18 January 1966

The Indexing of Historical Writings

1. Introduction

The finished unit history or operational monograph normally should be equipped with some sort of analytical index and system of cross references, unless it is so short in page length that a separate index would be superfluous and seem pretentious. (In the case of very short historical summaries, by the way, the title of the summary, standing by itself and succinctly phrased topically, suffices as the index: it serves instantly as the complete index entry, so to speak, by which the paper can later be recognized by the reader, either when he notes the title at the top or when he encounters it on an index card in the master historical catalog.)

2. The Index

It is important to keep in mind that the purpose of the index is to help the reader later to look for particular subjects, or to help him find specific documents which otherwise would be scattered and buried obscurely in a given history, and not to impress someone with its erudition. The very word index derives originally from the Latin word for "informer"; conversely the index should not be a heavy-handed stumbling block, as implied by the later use of the term "index" to cover censored books or books that have been purged. Nor should the index be overloaded with misleading minutiae. The index serves a purpose valuable for the author himself, it should be added, especially if he makes his own index (a practice which is highly recommended). Compiling the index is a useful exercise in itself, as a device of literary discipline for helping the author to organize and re-organize his thoughts and to collate, interrelate, and pull together (literally to "collect") his scattered accumulations of historical notes and raw documents.
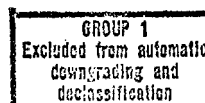
3. Organization

In order to be useful and not an unnecessary duplication, the index should be organized and presented, more or less deliberately, in one or more _different_ formats and with one or more _different_ subject approaches or built-in subject classifications; and above all it should not merely repeat the pattern of the text. That is, the indexer's subject approaches and perspectives, as reflected in the index, should differ and depart deliberately and markedly, and efficiently too, from the self-evident running sequences which are already to be found in the flow of the historical text itself. For example, when the text contains numerous important but scattered names of persons, or of organizations, or of localities, it might be found desirable to rearrange some or all of these types of names in some kind of useable order, alphabetical or otherwise, if the future reader is expected to want to recall and retrieve these name references from this particular history in his future reference and research.

4. Format

The index may take one or more of several forms. It might be an alphabetical list (like the conventional type of index found usually in the back of a published book, or near the front, as in some European publications). Or it might be a list in some sort of non-alphabetic or "classified" order (as in a table of contents which enumerates the chapters and sub-chapters on different topics, or a classification scheme for re-arranging certain kinds of data on selected topics and sub-topics in a different order from the text). Or the index might take a more graphic form than a tabular list: it might be an index map which, ingeniously, is able to show in a single-page pictorial display a variety of specific document numbers, for example dossier references or agent case numbers, at each of the pertinent localities that have been discussed in a complicated monograph -- one which deals, say, with foreign operations in a given geographical region. Another kind of graphic index might be a pictorial layout, e.g., a composite aerial reconnaissance photo that is coded to specific documentary sources; or it might be an organizational chart which could be adapted to show by document numbers, arranged in echelon, different historical treatments or archival sources on the organizational development of a given component. While a routine alphabetic list at the back is the most common type of index and often the most useful, it might well be less useful in some histories than some of the other formats suggested above.

-2-

5. Location

Next, the index can be presented to the reader at any one of several places in the finished history, and not necessarily at the very back of the report. It can be prominently displayed at the front, to be sure, either as a table of contents, (which, in fact, is an index, of sorts) or as a companion tool to be used with the table of contents. If it is a highly sensitive "Rosetta stone" index to certain collateral data, the index can be kept quite separate from the history, and separately controlled and security-classified. On the other hand, the index may be tucked away in the back with other appendices that contain related reference tools, such as documentary excerpts, bibliographies, or glossaries. (Glossaries, however, sometimes can be much more efficiently handled if they are integrated into the main alphabetical index in a single alphabetical sequence, with suitable definitions and cross references to the relevant text, rather than presented as one more in a long series of separate appendices to annoy the reader.)

Aside from the back or the front of the history, the index might in some cases be placed somewhere in between, for example as an insert somewhere near the pertinent narrative, perhaps in order to show the geographical dispersion of certain operational documents (as with an index map) or to show biographical references and other personnel files (as in a recapitulated roster of key personnel in a given operation). Or the index can be inconspicuously and unobtrusively entered in a footnote here or there, or it can even be entered directly in a passage of the text itself (as in the case of simple cross reference introduced parenthetically in the text). Documentary footnotes (and bibliographies, too) are, in fact, a documentary index par excellence when properly fashioned, and much more useable than some of the more conventional catalogs and inventories by which archival material is customarily indexed: an entire sequence of footnotes drawn from a given archival collection is an index of the highest order to that collection.

6. Content

The central focus in making an index, so as to keep it useful and to keep it from being gratuitous to the reader or a meaningless routine for the compiler, is to be certain about the subject perspectives or the subject approaches -- the aspects, the facets of the history -- which are to be conveyed and which must be deliberately, not unconsciously, "built in," by the author, into the structure of the index. And it is also

important to disarm and guide the reader, by means of a prefatory note, to tell him rather exactly what the index does seek to cover and what it ignores. While subject headings and subject classifications sometimes seem to be infinitely numerous and elaborately complex, they can be readily grouped under a very few general subject approaches commonly applicable to indexing of unit histories and operational monographs. These recurring, general points of view include the following five principal categories -- categories which first should be decided on, by deliberate choice, and then applied directly to the indexing job, selectively and perceptively and rigorously:

     a. <u>Organizational</u>: unit names, unit symbols (acronyms), cryptonyms, shortened and inverted names, etc., applicable to Agency components, to affiliated and associated agencies of the U.S. and of the allies, to opposition organizations, and to committees and organized groups of all kinds, foreign and domestic, which figure significantly in intelligence operations, covert action, and technical and administrative support histories.

     b. <u>Biographical</u> (personalities; or the personal-name approach): true names, aliases, and "aka" names of all kinds.

     c. <u>Geographical</u>: countries, regions, neighborhoods, communities -- place names and localities of all kinds, not to be confused with names of foreign governments or names of Agency stations and bases (see a. above) or their leaders (see b. above).

     d. <u>Chronological</u>: either specific dates, periods of time, or sequences of events are peculiarly historical and hence commonly involved in historical indexing; chronological aspects are commonly indexed either as actual figures in time or as coined events, e.g., "December 7, 1941" or "Pearl Harbor"; "1939-45" or "World War II;" "1950-53" or Korean War"; 1953-60" or "Dulles regime"; "November 1963" or "Kennedy Assassination" etc., etc. Regardless whether expressed alphabetically or numerically, headings and sub-headings are normally covered in historical indexes, and sometimes they are more workable when presented in tables of contents, or in chronological tables which are specifically tailored to serve as documentary indexes.

     e. <u>Topical</u>: missions, objectives, functions, programs, actions, policies, procedures, methodologies, doctrines, trade-

craft, problem "areas" (non-geographical), priorities, and other similar kinds of topical concepts and operating and management terminology which are commonly discussed in histories or intelligence operations, of covert action, or of technical and administrative support. The indexer's principal problem here is to avoid unnecessary duplication, with such matters as: organizationally named programs and functions (see a. above); with personally directed actions or processes (see b. above); geographically oriented procedures and objectives (see c. above); or chronologically identified operations, actions, and priorities (see d. above). In any case, the index headings, as they emerge, must be reconciled, skillfully, with proper cross references and subheadings, so as to reflect all five of these basic approaches to historical writing and reference.

7. Conclusion

Finally, in order to be properly comprehensive, the index should not be limited to the main texts: i.e., they should not ignore appendices, footnotes, and illustrations which contain substantive historical material. On the contrary, it is the "buried" material in such places as footnotes, bibliographies, and documentary excerpts which, if they have been carefully compiled, deserve the most careful and attentive indexing, because it is that kind of authoritative material that is more likely to be at least as much sought after, in future reference, as are the covering texts in which the archival material has been summarized and interpreted. Therefore, if the index is to be made sufficiently comprehensive, the pagination systems accordingly must be fashioned ample and simple enough to permit numerical references that move easily and comfortably among the different parts of the same history -- the page numbers, the chapter numbers, the volume numbers, the appendix numbers, the illustration numbers, the footnote numbers, etc. These numbering systems need not be complicated, separate systems. Indeed in general they can be gathered together into a single pagination system. Furthermore they should be readily compatible with machine indexing systems.

In short, the making of the index to the unit history or to the operational monograph should be a carefully coordinated task -- one that is integral to the entire collection, research, and dissemination cycle of historical writing and historical reference, and one that reflects the highest standards of editorial excellence.